

Chapter 12

The impact of development of religious tourism on the host community - A case study of Mount E'mei in China

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12.1 Introduction

Going on a pilgrimage is included in the concept of tourism, and a new form of tourism, religious tourism, has been created (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005). A review of English language literature sources reveals fewer studies related to the Buddhist religion compared to the other main religions. However a review of literature sources in Chinese (Gao and She, 2010) makes it clear that Chinese scholars pay more attention to the development and resources of religious tourism, in particular Buddhism. Sharpley (2014) notes that religious tourism can have a deep impact on a locality.

This chapter discusses relationships between religions and tourism, stakeholders' perceptions and factors that influence their views. A case study of the different impacts of development of Buddhism related tourism in Mount E'mei on the host community is included, which was based on a series of interviews with relevant tourism industry stakeholders. Recommendations for the improved development of religious tourism in Mount E'mei are also presented.

12.2. The relationship between religions and tourism

Traveling for religious motivation is probably the oldest and most widespread form of travel in human history (Kaelber, 2006) and exerts significant economic influence. Fourie, Rossello, and Santana (2015) believe that the interaction between religion and tourism is derived from the concept of distance, culture and cultural affinity and tourists consider them when they selecting a destination. Fourie et al. (2015, p.52) also consider the practical significance of religious tourism and argue that 'our view is that religious belief is a cultural attribute that shapes tourists' perceptions of their destination'. Qin (1998) argues that religious tourism has a positive influence on social stabilization and group integration. Religious culture and its sacred atmosphere could affect tourists' feelings and behaviours (Bao and Chen, 1996). Wang and Huang (2005) believe that the value of religious travel is embodied in its status as the resource of humanities and culture, which is one of the reasons why people organize tourist activities.

Several authors argue that religion is a driving force of tourism (Hyde and Harman, 2011; Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Dora, 2012).

The Cyprus Tourism Organisation (2006) classifies religious sites into three classes: pilgrimage shrines, religious space and religious festivals. Woodward (2004) and Paulette (2005) believe that the attractions of religious sites, for instance temples, monasteries, mosques, cathedrals and churches, are not only embodied in their spiritual value, but also in their inherent cultural, recreational and educational peculiarities. Such attractions catch the tourists' attentions and encourage their arrival. However, not all travellers to sacred sites were pilgrims; Shackley (2002) finds that many travellers tended to visit religious cultural heritage assets for the purpose of relaxing and learning rather than worship and ceremony. Because these religious assets can have a great effect on tourist markets, and could be used to strengthen a destination's uniqueness and competitiveness, some studies regard these heritages as important tourism attractions within the local tourism industry (Francis et al., 2010). However, Mattila et al. (2001) disagrees and points out that too many religious events could impede travellers' arrival. Cohen (1998) provides two possible instances to support this idea: explicit policies to restrict visitors not having a strong faith in the dominant religion, and some barriers relative to the religious atmosphere in the destination, for example the risk of conflicts and the extreme behaviour of fundamentalist believers. In consideration of different views of religious tourism, this chapter adopts Zhang et al. (2007) opinion that religious tourism is 'a special tourist activity orientated by religious culture, with the help of specific eco-cultural environment. It refers to such special tourist activities as worshiping, research, sightseeing and culture carried out by religious followers and lay tourists (p. 110).'

The largest religious groups in the world include Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism (Dyck, 2014). A review of relevant literature sources reveals that many researchers discuss features of Christian tourism, such as its architecture, pilgrimage, events, holy land, art, and development stages (Goodburn et al., 2012; Caton et al., 2013; Tirca and Stanciulescu, 2011). When it comes to Islamic tourism, many studies focus on Hajj, cultural conflicts, the history and status of holy land, and local regions (Henderson, 2003; Eid, 2012; Brdese, Corbitt and Pittayachawan, 2013; Tajzadeh-Namin, 2012; Ghadami, 2012). Studies in the field of Hindu tourism are concerned about pilgrimage; history; development stages; heritage; sustainable; cultural conflicts (Perera and Chandra, 2010; Shinde, 2008; Shinde, 2015). Finally, Buddhist tourism publications consider development stages in China, Taiwan, Japan and other regions

as well as heritage and pilgrimage (e.g. Xi et al., 2006; Wang, 2012; Yu, 2013; Wang and Hong, 2011).

12.3. Local stakeholders' perceptions towards tourism and influential factors

Scholars consider that tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on local stakeholders (Jafari, 2001; Lee, 2013; Simmons, 1994; Williams, Riden and Uysal, 1995; Yoon, Gursoy and Chen, 2001). Hence, many researchers emphasise the necessity of increasing cooperation in the stage of planning (Marsh and Henshall, 1987; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Long, 1991). Freeman (1983) points out that there are several roles that need to be considered by tourism planners: the tourists, activist groups, residents, local business, employees, government, competitors and national business chains. Robson and Robson (1996) add transport providers, media organisations and travel agents.

Huang and Chen (2008) analyze the important value of religious tourism for different stakeholders: tourists, residents and organizations in the destination as well as all members of society. They argue that the travellers would gain tourist values, the residents and relevant organisations would get economic values, and social members would acquire social values from interactions with this religious tourism industry, and religious and cultural heritages could get better protection.

Previous research shows that some religious hosts treat tourism as a threat (Raj and Morpeth, 2007; Joseph and Kavoori, 2001), believing that decorum, safety and security in sacred places is compromised by the tourists' presence (Shackley, 2002, 2006; Raj and Morpeth, 2007). Nolan and Nolan (1992, p.73) even suggest that administrators consider arranging important pilgrimage activities in the tourist off-season and restoring the special area for worship to avoid 'the potential conflicts between tourists and pilgrims.'

Local residents have the most profound connection with local tourism. Potential competition between tourists and residents for resources existed and could increase residents' negative perceptions, and thus was likely to negatively impact visitors' travel decision making (Prayag et al., 2013). Royo and Ruiz (2009) view that maintaining local residents' positive attitude towards local tourism development was important. When local peoples have a negative perception, they could reflect any complaints on to the travellers and thus make the travellers feel unwelcome and less likely to revisit.

Vargas, Porras and Plaza (2010) notice that local people are usually be impacted by three elements; tourist's behaviours, their density and the level of tourism development as perceived by local people. What is more, the degree of residents' related interest determines how they treat the tourism development. Allen et al. (1993) discover that when residents establish a good relationship between travellers and tourist activities and their own interests, then the residents tend to have a positive attitude about local tourism development. The stakeholders who obtain the most benefit from tourism development are also its most active supporters. Madrigal (1993) insists that the local residents' level of reliance upon local tourism, such as the form and deepness of interaction, the industries' significance to the local communities and the destination's developing status should be taken into account. Royo and Ruiz (2009) add two more relevant points: residents' usage and allocation of tourism resources, and their emotions and sense of responsibility towards the community.

Apart from external reasons, the population heterogeneity in the destination can also cause people to have different feelings towards the same thing. Some people supported the tourism development when they saw the benefits, while others disagree with it when perceiving the potential disadvantages. Furthermore, people's position in the local community and their demographic characteristics (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010) influence the views they have. In addition, the nature of tourism in the host destination also shapes people's opinions (Gursoy, Chi and Dyer, 2009).

12.4 The impacts of religious tourism at Mount E'mei in China

Buddhism has a long history in China and nearly all Chinese people, irrespective of their own beliefs, accept the behaviours of worship at particular events. Early research of this topic in China started during the 1980's. Chen, Xu and Lu (1986) refer to the religious tourism at Yuanshan Temple in their paper, and it is probably the earliest article about religious tourism development in modern China. Huang (1992) analyzes the tourism market and thinks religion should be seen as new form of tourism. After rejecting repetitive and non-academic literature, Gao and She (2010) gather 244 journal articles about religious tourism, from the period 1991 to 2009, into a Chinese journals full text database (CJFD) and classify them according to different themes. The CJFD reveals that Chinese scholars pay more attention to the resource and development of religious tourism. Many researchers have meaningful discussions about the development of religious tourism within the scope of a province, autonomous region or

municipality (Cui, Liu and Yang, 1998; Jing, 2003; Wang, 1993; Wang, 2008; Yang and Chen, 2000; Yang and Cao, 2004; Yang, 2002; Xie, Liang and Huang, 2007; Xue, 2006).

This chapter presents a case study of Mount E'mei in China and is based upon a series of in-depth interviews to understand the degree of influence of religious tourism on the local community. Fourteen interviews, in Mandarin, were undertaken with different stakeholders; local residents (LR), religious hosts (RH), religious tourism administrators (RA), and local businesses (LB), in January 2016. The interviews were then translated into English. Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse all the interview scripts and different codes were used to differentiate interviewees.

12.4. The view of general impacts

The development of religious tourism has a great influence on the daily life of local residents. Such influence can be summarised into four aspects: economic impacts, social impacts, cultural impacts and environmental impacts. The following section, with relevant comments from interviewees, discusses these impacts in detail.

Economic impacts

The most direct influence is the increasing number of visitors who stimulate the local economy. A respondent said that "E'mei has a growing reputation because of the rites of Samantabhadra. Many foreigners from other countries came to E'mei to live or to invest in the real estate" (LR B5). Another one supported the same idea "...no matter how extensive the propaganda is, no one comes there without the fame of Samantabhadra" (RH B1). When talking about its economic impact on the local, some interviewees believed "the development definitely brings more tourists and boosts the economy" (LR B10). "More investment and hotel chains from abroad come in because of the development of tourism; these hotels are an improvement for the local community" (LR B8) and community was considered to "benefit a lot from the tourism related investment" (LR B7).

The prosperity of local religious tourism promotes employment. As more investment came in and a series of hotel chains opened in the destination, local people are able to obtain more employment opportunities (LR B7&8; RM B11; RA B14). In addition, the demand of guides, waiters in the scenic as well as artists are common during the peak season (RM B10&11; RA

B13). Tourism managers admitted this impact, “It drives the promotion of urban employment, living standard and the construction of infrastructure. I think this kind of effect is ‘very much’ if evaluated according to the five dimensional scale” (RA B14). This result accords with the opinions from Andereck and Nyaupane (2010) that tourism industry offered local residents more opportunities to work.

The relevant Buddhist products used and sold in the temple were offered by local enterprises (RC B10) and it embodied the Murphy and Murphy (1985) view that local manufacturing provided many products in tourist market. Local residents buy additional souvenirs such as peace symbol papers (LR B5), candles and joss sticks, bracelets (LR B5&6) and Buddhist prayer beads (LR B8 & RM B10), the general price was under 100 yuan (10 pounds). Other people would like to choose the commodity with high price and held the view that only authentic Buddhist supplies from temples were needed (LR B6).

The cost of living in E’mei is a significant indicator for measuring the living standard of local residents. Some interviewees regarded its inflation as “a general rule and was inevitable in China” (LR B5), “it is not so obvious” (LR B8); but it did not have too many affiliations with the tourist development” (LR B6). Certain residents consider the situations in the city centre and tourist destination separately; LR B10 insisted, “the price within the attraction raised a lot. But the price within the city did not change that much”. Nevertheless, a religious host expressed a different opinion in terms of the pricing of products in the tourist destination:

“All products are priced by the circulation department. It certainly has profits in it and that is why merchants do the business. We will lose our source of income if selling is not profitable. You cannot value our income from only one aspect. Our catering and accommodation will be in loss every year if we account it separately while these infrastructures are essential for providing rooms and food for visitors and believers... You cannot just say we have high profit in this item; we are also in loss at other items” (RH B3).

The impact of religious tourism also effects residents’ income. Some respondents who worked in catering and artistic souvenir shops have direct feeling about its impact on business, “our restaurant meant to provide the vegetarian dishes and quiet dining environment to our

customers, as we actually try to make our customers feel like they are eating in the temple...and in order to make the restaurant fit more into the atmosphere. There are many Buddhism sculptures being used on the decoration in restaurant. This is also the key label and branding of my restaurant” (RM B10). “I sell the commodity based on their (tourist) preference... My income is approximately 50% obtained by selling beautiful scenery and 50% by Buddhist-relate artwork” (RM B11).

Social impacts

One of the most important impacts was on the living standard of citizens; most respondents agreed that it “directly promote...the construction of infrastructures in this city” (LR B5), and “there are a few changes” (LR B7), and “some changes has happened in this area” (LR B6). This finding is consistent with Liu and Var (1986) in that the development of tourism would enhance the living standard at a destination. Residents also mentioned that the road was repaired well and there are more sanitation workers (LR B6); “It makes the city more beautiful” (LR B9), an elder respondent who witnessed the development of the city described these changes “it had influence on local economy, including the farm stay. It has made a great difference compared with the situation when I was starting to be a nun... So it is obvious that this area has a great development...the local villagers...it brings a great influence on their economy” (RH B2). The government has future plans to expand more relevant leisure facilities in the area,

“We try to make E’mei become an international tourist destination. Not like the past, visitors just did some sightseeing in the mountain and left once they went downhill. This situation should be changed (and we develop this destination towards the direction of) a place of leisure, tourism, conferences and exhibitions and retirement...There are a few scenic spots which have been built, such as the Buddha Temple, the Hexiu River. They not only serve tourists, but also offer the leisure place for residents.” (RA B14).

Religious tourism brings great changes to the monks’ lifestyle, and adds new functions to the temple:

“Today’s life source differs from that in the past and the function of temple has change a lot. It was a place of practice while today it added many other branches. Monks only

practiced and laboured in the past, but nowadays some of them started to receive the customers; today, many things need us to be dealt with.... There are many temples in the mountain and our distributions are adjusted by Buddhism association occasionally....These days the frequency of practice together is less as our time becomes more intense. We had more time to practice together when not so many tourists visited there in the past” (RH B3).

Hughes, Bond and Ballantyne (2013) discovered similar situations, in that some religious spots had to meet travellers’ differing requirements at the same time as defining themselves as places for worship and ceremony. The changes happening around them are also followed by adjustments to the management of religion within the scenic spot. Furthermore, religious tourism causes the shift of responsibility of relic’s protection and maintenance. According to the respondent who was engaged in the Buddhism administration, government allocated less money for temples’ preservation and the temples paid most of expenditures: “Many buildings in our temple are historical relics. Cultural Bureau ought to give us appropriate funds for routine maintenance but they did not. They relied on us and our merit money” (RH B3). The association staff also mentioned that the original Buddhist Temple had been destroyed during the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, while now it has been rebuilt because of the needs of developing religious tourism,

“At that time, we appropriated this land for construction at a low price because the government also wants us to build the temple as the Buddha Temple really existed in the history. It was built in Ming Dynasty but it disappeared later after the revolution. Afterwards, [the government] started to develop religious tourism in E’mei. They probably have the needs of building Buddhist architecture and cultural propaganda; so they suggest that we rebuild the Buddha Temple” (RA B13).

Traffic congestion is a common problem for a tourist city. Some residents pointed out that its situation was quite serious in the scenic area and “the route to Mount E’mei remained congestions during certain big events” (LR B5), while others disagreed “because many tourists visited there as a group and they travelled in a bus.” (LR B6). When discussing the downtown area, some people thought that traffic congestion was “comparatively heavy” (LR B8) and happened “everywhere” (LR B7). Parking is an associated traffic problem. Residents found

that “It was correspondingly difficult to park their car in the scenic spot” (LR B5), “usually it is hard for us to find a parking space” (LR B7). The city manager considered this problem to be the result of a large tourist population and pointed out that “a huge amount of tourists gather here and it is so crowded...the top capacity has reached 80,000 people per day in the peak season while the capacity of Mount E’mei is only 20,000 persons per day” (RA B14). Such an argument is consistent with previous studies (Prayag et al, 2003; Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001) which mention that issues of traffic congestion and parking are common in tourist destinations.

The behaviour of tourists is another element which concerned stakeholders. Above all, it was considered to be “not civilized enough...and may ruin the local environment” (LR B7); a merchant in a tourist centre complained about their impolite manners, “I could see somebody act very rude. This is inevitable that there is too much population within the attraction. For example, there are many customers in our restaurants always speaking very loudly which are really annoying” (RM B10). Other interviewees commented that “Some impolite phenomenon certainly exist but it is not so heavy” (LR B8); others noted problems such as “throwing litter about” (RA B11) and “jumping the queue” (LR B8&9). The tourists’ behaviour was considered to influence the monks and nuns’ practice. “There is no doubt that the presence of too many visitors will influence the process of events, and that is why we need safeguard” (RA B13), and similar descriptions occurred in Shackley’s (2006) studies. Other monk observed “these days, the frequency of practice together is less as our time become more intense. So the answer is definitely.”(RH B3). However, some religious hosts argued that “the real practice is to practice yourself but not judge others” (RH B1), “The ancients saying said that, ‘a real hermit life in the bustling place’...The temples give people the positive energy. If people bring the positive back home and give it to the society, the positive energy could benefit the other people.”

Cultural impacts

During Buddhism’s period of development in E’mei it penetrated deeply into local culture and formed an intergenerational cultural inheritance within numerous families. Many residents have a “neutral attitude to Buddhism (LR B5&6) and some Buddhist concepts, such as “good act will be well rewarded” and karma were received by them; most people agreed that these concepts “are positive” (LR B6) and they chose to trust “part of it” (LR B7) or “a little” (LR B8). Moreover, most of their family have a religious tradition and their parents or grandparents were believers (LR B5&6&7&8&9). Furthermore, most of them had attended certain Buddhist

activities accompanied with elder family members. Moreover, the concept of religion has penetrated into their local culture and become an essential part of it; a few residents believed that Buddhism “brings the city residents peace” (LR B10); others found that “...businessmen who believed in Buddhism would be more cautious and virtuous” (LR B6). As for the religious host, they thought that it had an obvious impact on family’s harmony; “Many laymen around us will adjust their characteristics after believing in Buddhism; with the change of their characteristics, their family becomes more harmonious” (RH B2); and laymen also agree with this idea, “I think it’s beneficial to not only me, but also my family and country. Buddhism calls for people to do something good. It makes me feel healthy and peaceful during my retirement” (RH B4).

Certain ideas about the impact of religious tourism on the life quality of citizens have been discussed. The cultural and leisure activities of natives have been influenced during the development of religious tourism. Some people thought that the development of religious tourism enhanced the quality of life in E’mei, “The information and new lifestyle which brought by foreigners will influence local residents’ lifestyle” (LR B5); more art museums and buildings were established for cultural needs (RM B11). The improvements in citizens’ quality of lives following tourism developments are discussed by researchers, (Akis, Peristianis and Warner, 1996; Korca, 1996). Furthermore, the government has popularized a few relevant events to enhance the development of the tourism industry, “The most famous event in E’mei is the international martial arts festival and the Tourist Trade Fair is starting to become known. We also have the Tea Exposition and we prepare to recover the Buddhist Temple worship” (RA B14).

Environnemental impacts

Andereck et al. (2005) point out that environmental problems can occur alongside the development of tourism. A local residents noted the “growing phenomenon of throwing litter about” (LR B5) even though the resident had a positive evaluation of the impact of religious tourism on the local environment. A merchant in the scenic spot insisted “the pollution is obvious within the attraction area as most tourists usually burn the sticks for praying” (LR B10). However some people disagreed with this view, “the overall environment quality was good” (LR B5), “the environment is much better than before” (LR B7). Relevant to this point, a city governors said it was under review, and “, in order to bring the blue sky back to E’mei, all of

our big factories [which harm the environment] such as cement plants and Aluminum alloy factory, have been closed” (RA B13).

12.4. The factors which influence the view of stakeholders

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of stakeholders, including their geographic position, belief, occupation and length of time living in the community; their reliance upon the local tourism industry is also considered. Therefore Table 1 reflects the significant elements that influence the views of stakeholders.

Table 1. The background of stakeholders

Group	Religious host (RH)	Local residents (LR)	Relevant Merchant (RM)	Religious tourism administrators (RA)
Geographic position	Live in the scenic spots (B1&B3); Live in the Buddhism college which is situated in the city center (B2)	lived in the vicinity of scenic spot (B5); live in the downtown (B6&B7&B8&B9);	lived in the vicinity of scenic spot (B10&B11); lived in the suburbs (B12);	/
Are they satisfied the development of tourism?	Mount E'mei is attractive (B2); Mount E'mei has passed its golden time (B3)	“The life in E'mei was relatively cozy” (B5); “It can be better” (B6&B8); “I don't think it is really satisfying” (B7); Quite satisfied (B9)	Quite satisfied (B10); “It's fine” (B11&B12);	“It needs a further ascension” (B14);
How do they relate to Buddhism?	Believe in Buddhism (B1&B2&B3&B4)	“I am belonging to the neutrality” (B5&B6); “I believe part of it” (B7&B8); “I believe in Buddhism” (B9);	Believe in Buddhism but not follow the Buddhism rules strictly (B10); “I do not totally believe it” (B12) Does not believe in Buddhism (B11);	“it is one of five cultures in E'mei” (B14); “To be a monk means to choose another lifestyle and higher pursuit.” (B13);
Where do they	From	From the elder	From the elder family	/

get the relevant Buddhism message?	temple(B1&B2 &B3&B4); From the elder family member (B2)	family member (B5&B6&B7); From the propaganda in the community (B5&B9); From temple (B7&B8);	member (B10&B12); From temple (B10&B12); From internet (B10) From the propaganda in the community (B11);	
Did they obtain income from the development of local tourism industry?	Receive the contributions from laymen and visitors (B1&B2&B3)	“my mother was engaged in tourism industry” (B5); “No” (B6&B7); “I am engaged in hotel industry” (B8); “I am a tour guide.” (B9);	“I opened a restaurant in the attraction area.” (B10); “A little” (B11); “works in the business of produce and selling tea” (B12)	Work in tourism administration and get salary(B13&B14);
The length of time living in the local community	Enter the temple in the youth (B1&B2); “It has been 30 years” (B3); “It’s about 36 years” (B4)	Be born in E’mei and grew up here (B5&B6&B7); Be born in E’mei and be in work (B9); Has moved to E’mei for 25 years (B8)	Be born in E’mei and be in work (B10&B11&B12)	/

Thus Table 1 shows that almost all the respondents have a friendly attitude towards Buddhism, that their acceptance levels increases with age and that most interviewees got relevant information from elder members of their family. In addition, people who are directly or indirectly engaged in local tourism industry generally have higher satisfaction about the development of tourism. A similar conclusion was made by Allen et al. (1993), who believed that the residents were likely to consider the development of tourism positively when they get involved in it. However, there was no clear relevance between geographical locations of respondents and other factors illustrating in the table. These findings do not not reflect the views of Belisle and Hoy (1980) and Sheldon and Var (1984) that people who live closer to the tourist zone will show more appreciation to the development of tourism.

12. 5 Conclusions and Implications

Chapter 12 discusses the impacts of the development of religious tourism and the effects upon the local community at Mount E'mei. These impacts and effects were evaluated by establishing the views of different stakeholders and exploring the different factors that influence their views. The findings show how stakeholders considered the changes brought about by the development of religious tourism over several decades. Both positive and negative impacts were observed from different stakeholders.

It is also clear that certain factors influence stakeholders' perceptions towards the development of religious tourism. As they get older, and their reliance upon the tourism industry grows, then most stakeholders got more satisfied with the development of religious tourism. The longer residents lived in E'mei, the more likely they believed in Buddhism, and people who tended to believe in the Buddhism regarded tourism development positively. In addition, most residents started to learn about the Buddhist religion when they were very young, and the source of that information were elder members of the family.

Several recommendations are offered in consideration of the findings of this study and its comparison with previous studies. Firstly, to deal with the issues of traffic congestion, the traffic authority should extend public transportation and guide private drivers to alter their travel habits. It also needs to control vehicle flows according to different times and areas (Han and Yu, 2014) via publishing special regulations in peak time. Secondly, potential solutions for the parking problem might be to ask the developers of recreation centres and other real estate to build larger parking lots and to construct parking facilities near the downtown area. However, the root of the problem is too many vehicles on the street. Consequently, altering visitors' travel habits by developing a good public transport system is important. Thirdly, the air pollution caused by the burning of joss sticks at scenic spots is a common issue in China (Bao and Chen, 1996) while it is a traditional Buddhist custom. The ideal solution is to change the raw material of joss sticks and utilize environmentally-friendly materials instead.

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